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## **PRESS RELEASE**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**February 20, 2002**

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# **U.S. Customs Official Sentenced for Role in Conspiracy to Transport Illegal Aliens**

**PHOENIX, ARIZONA** -- A U.S. Customs Inspector assigned to the San Luis, Port of Entry was sentenced in federal court on Tuesday, February 19, 2002, to twenty-one months imprisonment for his role in a conspiracy to transport illegal aliens.

The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona announced that former U.S. Customs Inspector RICHARD TALAMANTE, age 37, was sentenced by U.S. District Judge James A. Teilborg on one count of Conspiracy to Bring In, Transport and Harbor Illegal Aliens for Private Financial Gain and one count of Tampering with a Witness.

TALAMANTE was indicted by a federal grand jury on February 21, 2001, after an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Custom Service Office of Internal Affairs, and United States Border Patrol, revealed that he had allowed individuals to smuggle illegal aliens into the United States while on duty as an inspector at the San Luis Port of Entry. During a subsequent investigation of the offense, Talamante attempted to persuade one of the individuals who smuggled undocumented aliens through his lane to provide false information to federal investigators. He pled guilty to the Conspiracy and Witness Tampering charges on September 27, 2001.

Documents filed during the proceedings established that on May 3, 2001, the defendant allowed Berenice Ortiz to smuggle three illegal aliens into the United States through an inspection lane at the San

Luis Port of Entry where he was working. Ortiz then drove to TALAMANTE'S home, where his wife, Christina Talamante, loaded the aliens into her personal vehicle and began driving towards Phoenix. Christina Talamante was to be paid \$1,300 for each of the illegal aliens that she delivered to the Phoenix Airport. Further investigation revealed that TALAMANTE had previously participated in similar alien smuggling schemes with his wife, Christina Talamante on approximately ten other occasions. Christina Talamante was prosecuted in a separate case. In addition, TALAMANTE also admitted having allowed two other individuals to smuggle aliens into the United States through his lane at the San Luis Port of Entry on multiple of occasions. On each of those occasions, TALAMANTE was paid for allowing the undocumented aliens to pass through his inspection lane.

TALAMANTE joins a growing number of federal officials who have been accused of wrongdoing at the San Luis Port of Entry. On January 7 , 1998, U.S. Customs Senior Inspector Bobby J. Butler, a 19-year veteran of the U.S. Customs Service, pled guilty to two counts of unlawful disclosure of classified information, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1905. Those charges arose from Butler's disclosure to known drug traffickers of information concerning the details of upcoming narcotics destruction operations involving millions of dollar of confiscated drugs.

On August 18, 1999, I.N.S. Inspector Ronnie Joseph Brickey was indicted for income tax evasion resulting from his expenditure of over \$150,000.00 in unreported cash he received and spent during the 1998 taxable year. That indictment alleged that Brickey, while engaged in his official duties as an Inspector at the San Luis Port of Entry, allowed drug-laden vehicles to cross into the United States from Mexico in exchange for large cash payoffs. After a three week trial, a jury convicted Brickey on all counts. On October 25, 2000, U.S. District Judge Earl H. Carroll sentenced Brickey to 37 months incarceration and assessed a \$40,000.00 fine.

Last year, on June 25, 2001, U.S. Immigration Inspector Gustavo Ramirez was sentenced to 30 months incarceration and fined \$12,500.00 for conspiracy and bribery in connection with the November 19, 2000, seizure of 582.9 pounds of marijuana which were discovered in two vehicles Ramirez allowed to enter the United States at the San Luis Port of Entry. Ramirez is currently serving his sentence in federal custody.

Most recently, on January 25, 2002, U.S. Customs Inspector Manuel Silva was sentenced to 34 months incarceration and fined \$2,500.00 for his role in a Conspiracy to Transport and Harbor Illegal Aliens for Financial Gain. An investigation in that case revealed that Silva had also allowed several individuals to pass through his inspection lane with undocumented aliens in exchange for payment.

“When a law enforcement officer chooses to violate the law, rather than uphold it, he harms his agency, the community and our country. We will devote every necessary resource to ensure that justice is served when federal officials choose to violate the trust and confidence of the public by engaging in corrupt activities,” said Assistant United States Attorney Susan Bradley.

The SILVA investigation was handled by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the United States Customs Service and the United States Border Patrol. The prosecution was handled by Michael Shelby, formerly an Assistant United States Attorney in Phoenix, Arizona, with assistance from Susan Bradley, an Assistant U. S. Attorney, Phoenix, Arizona.

CASE NUMBER: CR-01-0150-001-PHX-JAT      RELEASE NUMBER:2002-039